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ABSTRACT

Relationships between parental satisfaction and the quality of family day care were explored from a general systems perspective. Also considered were the relationships between parental satisfaction with care and their providers' job satisfaction, family structure, and training. The impact of shared childrearing values and beliefs on parental satisfaction with child care and provider job satisfaction were investigated. The study sample included 33 providers and 65 of their parent clients. No significant relationships were found between parental satisfaction with care and provider job satisfaction. However, parental satisfaction was positively correlated with shared childrearing values, the quality of the setting, and the training of the provider. Parental satisfaction was also higher when the provider's own young children were not in the day care system. Implications of the findings in regard to advice for parents and providers are discussed. Recommendations for further research are offered. (Author/RH)

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# FAMILY DAY CARE QUALITY AND PARENTAL SATISFACTION

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## Abstract

This paper explores the relationships between parental satisfaction and the quality of family day care from a general systems perspective. Specifically, it looks at the relationships between parental satisfaction with care and provider job satisfaction, provider's family structure, provider's training and the quality of care. It also looks at the impact of shared childrearing values and beliefs on both parental child care satisfaction and provider job satisfaction. Based on a sample of 33 providers and 65 of their parent clients, the study found no significant relationships linking parental satisfaction with care and provider job satisfaction. However parental satisfaction was positively correlated with shared childrearing values, the quality of the setting and the training of the provider. Parental satisfaction was also higher in the absence of the provider's own young children in the day care system. The implications of the findings with reference to advising parents and providers and recommendations for further research are discussed.

## FAMILY DAY CARE QUALITY AND PARENTAL SATISFACTION

### INTRODUCTION

Typically, parents are the final arbiters of who cares for their children while they work. Consequently, it is important to explore the relationship between parental satisfaction with child care arrangements and the quality of care provided. Because a general systems perspective would focus on the complexity of the relationships involved as well as the feedback among members which might serve as the basis for mutual satisfaction, it provides a useful framework for studying the question.

Despite the general outcry that quality day care is scarce, many studies of child care arrangements reveal that only a minority of parents have openly expressed dissatisfaction with their own child care arrangements (Whitehead, 1989; Atkinson, 1987b; Fuqua & Labensohn, 1986; Kontos & Wells, 1986; Handler & Fredlund, 1971; U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1975). Parents using family day care (FDC) tend to be the most dissatisfied with their child care arrangements, but their usual complaint is only that the educational component is not strong enough (Leavitt, 1987; Pence & Goelman, 1985).

One study conducted by Whitehead (1989), for a sample of 46 family day care providers paired with data from 115 mothers using their services, found the only predictor of maternal satisfaction with day care was a mother's perception of shared childrearing beliefs and values. Whitehead (1989) did not find a significant

correlation between quality of child care as measured by the Family Day Care Rating Scale (Harms & Clifford, 1984) and maternal satisfaction with child care. Whitehead's findings suggest that for family day care: 1) parental satisfaction with child care is highly subjective and not easily predicted by standardized measures of child care quality; and 2) congruence in beliefs and values between the FDC provider and her client may be the true basis for parental satisfaction.

Leavitt's (1987) exploration of the relationships between FDC providers and their clients indicated that many parents seem to rely on impressions of the FDC provider from initial contacts, hearsay and the positive reactions of their children to the provider as proof of the quality of care provided. Parents in Leavitt's (1987) sample rarely spent any significant amount of time observing the quality of care themselves.

Endsley, Bradbard & Raddick (1984) found that the best predictors of parents selecting a high-quality day care setting (as rated by day care experts) were higher husband's education, dissatisfaction with previous day care, and if the husband and wife made the day care decison jointly. Having a greater number of children in the family and choosing a center because of its location were negatively related to the choice of a high quality center.

A systems perspective would view family day care as a complex system of relationships encompassing the FDC provider,

her own nuclear family, the children in care and the parent clientele. There would be constant feedback crossing the boundaries between the members consisting of both information and affirmation. A systems perspective has been applied to family day care to study turnover among providers (Bollin, 1989), and to evaluate how family day care affects the provider's relationships with her own family (Atkinson, 1988). It has not yet been used specifically to examine the relationships between parents and providers to determine how parental satisfaction emerges from that interaction. From a systems theory framework, variables such as the FDC provider's personal job satisfaction, the number and ages of the provider's own children, the relationship between the provider and the parents, and commonly held values and beliefs would all appear to impact on parental satisfaction with child care arrangements. These factors might, indeed, have greater impact than objective measures of quality on parental satisfaction since parents do not seem to seek access to observable measures of quality.

Hypotheses. This study is an attempt to supplement the limited knowledge about the predictors of parental satisfaction with FDC by analyzing relevant variables from a systems perspective. Consequently, the hypotheses for the study were:

1) Parents' satisfaction with child care would be positively correlated with their providers' job satisfaction;

2) Parental satisfaction with child care arrangements would

be negatively correlated with the presence of the provider's own young children in the FDC system;

3) Parental satisfaction would be positively correlated with the quality of the family day care setting;

4) Both provider job satisfaction and parental child care satisfaction would be positively correlated with shared childrearing values and beliefs;

5) Hours of child care related training would be positively correlated with professional relationships with parents and parental child care satisfaction.

## METHODOLOGY

Sample. Included in the sample for this study were 33 registered FDC providers in Delaware who had participated simultaneously in two earlier studies, one concerned primarily with turnover among FDC providers (Bollin, 1989) and one concerned primarily with maternal satisfaction with family day care (Whitehead, 1989). Data was also obtained from 65 parents who were currently using the services of these providers.

Measures. Demographic data was gathered on all FDC providers which included number and ages of the providers' own children. Providers were asked to state the number of hours of day care training they had taken in the last 3 years. Job satisfaction was measured using the Job Satisfaction Scale of Family Day Care Providers (26 items) which had a demonstrated reliability of .83 (Cronbach's alpha) (Bollin, 1989).

Demographic data gathered on the parents was minimal, but included level of education and occupations of both parents, annual family income and ethnicity. Parents were asked to rate on a likert type scale how similar their values and beliefs were to those of their FDC providers. The Family Day Care Rating Scale (Harms & Clifford, 1984) was administered as a measure of quality in the family day care homes in the smaller study.

The Professionalization Score is based on a subscale of the Family Day Care Provider Attitude Scale (Bollin, 1989) originally formulated to explore the nature of boundaries established between providers and their clientele. The original scale was plagued with low reliablities that seemed to reflect FDC providers' own ambiguity about their roles. A subscale of 6 items dealing with professionalism as exhibited in concrete manifestations such as use of contracts, training and licensing achieved a modest reliability of .60 using the Kuder-Richardson method (Bollin, 1989).

Maternal satisfaction with day care was calculated as an average score on 14 items. Parents were asked to rate their providers, using a likert-type scale, on such variables as dependability, competence, materials available and discipline. The reliability for the scale was .87 using Cronbach's Alpha (Whitehead, 1989).

## RESULTS

Sample. The majority of the providers were married and had children. Almost 60% had children who were 5 years old or younger. The sample was predominantly Caucasian but included 6 Black providers. All but four had taken 10 or more hours of training in the last 3 years. Approximately half (57%) of the providers had been licensed for 2 years or less. Weekly rates ranged from $45.00 to $100.00 per week. The majority (67%) planned to continue providing care for at least 4 years.

Demographic information from the parents indicated the sample was predominantly Caucasian, well-educated and held white collar or professional jobs. Occupational categories were adapted from Blau and Duncan (1967). Not surprisingly, the annual family income and educational level for parents was in general slightly higher than that of the providers.

Hypothesis 1. No significant correlations were found linking parental satisfaction with child care arrangements and providers' job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2. Parents were significantly less satisfied with their child care arrangements when the provider's own young children were present in the FDC system ($t$=2.74,df=25,$p$=.01). There was also a positive correlation between the age of the provider's youngest child and parental child care satisfaction ($r$=.36(28),$p$=.03).

Hypothesis 3. Parental satisfaction was positively correlated with the quality of the setting ($r$=.48(27),$p$=.006). For this sample, the quality of the setting was also positively correlated with the family income of the provider ($r$=.44(25),$p$=.02) and her recent training ($r$=.45(27),$p$=.01).

Hypothesis 4. Both provider job satisfaction and parental child care satisfaction were positively correlated with shared childrearing values and beliefs ($r$=.43(28),$p$=.01 and $r$=.72(28),$p$=.001 respectively).

Hypothesis 5. Recent child care training did correlate positively with both professional attitudes of the providers towards parents ($r$=.33(31),$p$=.03) and parental child care satisfaction ($r$=.35(28),$p$=.03). However, professional attitudes were negatively correlated with number of years as registered providers ($r$=-.36(27),$p$=.03).

## DISCUSSION

The construct of parental satisfaction appears to be a complex one related to a variety of factors including the characteristics of the provider's family, especially the presence of her own young children; similarities between the provider's and parent's homes regarding beliefs and values; and, perhaps, standard quality measures, including an overall judgment of quality and training of the provider. Even given the exploratory nature of the first hypothesis, it is puzzling that

no significant relationship was found between parental satisfaction with child care and the provider's own job satisfaction. Two possible interpretations suggest themselves: a failure on the part of the provider to communicate or act on her dissatisfaction, or the absence of a relationship between the quality of care given and the provider's satisfaction with her job.

The finding that parents prefer child care arrangements without the presence of the FDC provider's own children present is a provocative one. Parents may feel that their own children are not as well cared for when there is competition from the provider's own children, or they may simply prefer experienced providers who have already raised their own children.

The finding of positive relationships between child care quality and provider training with parental satisfaction, while encouraging, should be interpreted with caution. Given that this represents a subsample of Whitehead's (1989) larger study, where significant correlations were not found, it is possible that these findings appear as a function of the small sample and disappear as the sample size grows.

The high correlation between FDC provider total family income and quality of the FDC home as measured by the FDC Rating Scale is a troubling one. It has two possible implications: 1) quality care requires significant financial resources, or 2) the FDC Rating Scale is skewed towards the resources and values of

upper SES providers.

A mother's perception of shared childrearing beliefs and values between her family and the FDC provider was positively related to both child care satisfaction and, interestingly, to provider job satisfaction. Parents in the process of making child care choices, as well as FDC providers interviewing clients may benefit from understanding the importance of this variable in overall satisfaction. The data suggest that satisfaction increases as a "goodness of fit" (French, Rodgers & Cobb, 1974) in beliefs and values is achieved.

The connection between child care training and professional attitudes towards parents, while not surprising, is a suggestive finding. A variable that has been little analyzed in much family day care research has been the content of the training provided. This result suggests that how to deal with parents has been an important component in providers' training and may pay dividends in better relationships between parents and providers.

The small sample size of this study makes the results suggestive rather than definitive. In addition, the correlational nature of the present study prohibits inferences regarding causation. However, the study does identify some important variables that need to be considered in evaluating FDC homes, advising parents in day care choices, and establishing directions for further research.

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